

BARROW BACKS LANDMARK BIPARTISAN BILL TO EXPAND MENTAL HEALTH COVERAGE

Legislation Will Help End Discrimination Against Patients with Mental Illnesses

Washington, D.C. -- Congressman John Barrow (GA-12) today joined a bipartisan majority in the House of Representatives in support of legislation that will help end discrimination against patients who need treatment for mental illnesses. The Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act was approved by a vote of 268-148. Barrow was an original co-sponsor of the legislation.

"Mental illnesses are treatable diseases that impact millions of Americans each year," said Barrow. "Right now, many group health plans don't cover mental illnesses like they do physical infirmities. I'm proud to support legislation that will help end this practice and ensure that more Americans will get the care they need and deserve."

The bipartisan bill approved today prohibits insurers and group health plans from imposing limits on mental health benefits that are more restrictive from those applied to medical and surgical services.

The legislation does not require health insurance plans to provide mental health benefits, but it does require parity between physical and mental health benefits when the plan provides coverage of both types of illness. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office has estimated that this legislation will have a miniscule impact on health insurance premiums.

Over the last eight years, the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) has made "parity" coverage for mental health care available to members of Congress and 8.5 million other federal employees. Research has shown that there has been no significant cost increase attributable to this new coverage. This bill gives all Americans the same access to affordable mental health services that are currently already available to members of Congress.

"Group health plans shouldn't get to cover some diseases and ignore others," added Barrow. "The legislation we passed today will help end this form of discrimination."

The bill is backed by a diverse group of organizations including, the American Medical Association, American Hospital Association, American Nurses Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, National Hispanic Medical Association, American Counseling Association, Families USA, American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, National Mental Health Awareness Campaign, and Mental Health America.

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